

Levelling the Lake: Transboundary Resource Management in the Lake of the Woods Watershed by Jamie Benidickson

Brittany Luby et Margaret Lehman

Volume 111, numéro 2, fall 2019

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065091ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065091ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Luby, B. & Lehman, M. (2019). Compte rendu de [*Levelling the Lake: Transboundary Resource Management in the Lake of the Woods Watershed* by Jamie Benidickson]. *Ontario History*, 111(2), 228–231.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1065091ar>

Carstairs, Philpott, and Wilmshurst thoroughly demonstrate, from an institutional perspective Bates was simultaneously the best and the worst thing to happen to the Health League. He was its founder and greatest champion but also, in time, the most detrimental legacy of its early history. The Canadian Red Cross's longevity and reach sprang from its flexibility and adaptability: it shifted its focus, altered its techniques, and refreshed the ranks of its leadership at key moments over more than a century. In contrast, the Health League broadened its mission to encompass new health issues but never fundamentally altered its central ideological position as wider social change unfolded. What had been a modern, forward-thinking organization in the 1920s became an anachronistically moralizing one by the 1970s. Bates's iron grip on the Health League meant that as his attitudes calcified with age, so did

those of the Health League, rendering it less effective and less influential.

The authors do their best to highlight the contributions of other Health League leaders but, as depicted here, the Health League was essentially a one-man show. The fact that it floundered after Bates's death in 1975 is particularly telling. His passion, commitment, skills, expertise, networks, and forceful personality propelled the Health League forward for five decades, but provided little or no opportunity for a natural successor to arise, nor for the organization to broaden its appeal to potential supporters and allies. *Be Wise! Be Healthy!* is therefore as much a narrative of the rise and fall of one man's vision, as it is a study of a public health organization and its campaigns.

Sarah Glassford
Leddy Library, University of Windsor

Levelling the Lake

Transboundary Resource Management in the Lake of the Woods Watershed

By Jamie Benidickson

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019. 404 pp. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN 9780774835497.
\$89.95 hardcover. ISBN 9780774835480. \$34.95 EPUB. ISBN 9780774835510.
\$34.95 PDF. ISBN:9780774835503. (www.ubcpress.ca)

In *Levelling the Lake: Transboundary Resource Management in the Lake of the Woods Watershed*, Jamie Benidickson explores the last one hundred and fifty years of resource exploitation in the watershed, the environmental consequences of that exploitation, as well as institutional responses to environmental change. The book begins in the late nineteenth century with the newly formed settler state of Canada obtaining lands from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and negotiating Treaty #3 with the

Anishinabeg to secure territorial access (5, 11). The resulting intergovernmental struggle between Canada and Ontario for control over resources on treaty lands helps to frame the watershed as a heavily contested and "complex transboundary setting" (xxx-iii). From this "complex" starting point, Benidickson traces struggles over the highly valuable sturgeon fisheries, forests, minerals, and water resources between Canada and the United States; Ontario, Manitoba, and Minnesota; and, between government

agents, corporatists, and citizens. Benidickson introduces readers to the ecological toll of human activity in each of these industries. Even seemingly low-impact industries like tourism are shown to have an environmental cost (108-09).

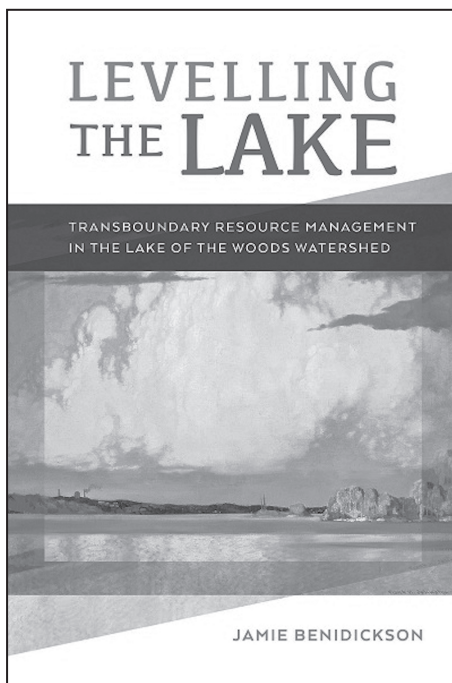
What is unique about Benidickson's approach to Canadian history specifically (and Canadian-American relations more generally) is geographic framing: Lake of the Woods Watershed. A watershed is a "land area that channels rainfall and snowmelt to creeks, stream, and rivers, and eventually to outflow points such as reservoirs, bays, and the ocean."¹ Benidickson insists that water research (and, indeed, water management) is best structured by flow. Why? Because political boundaries prohibit nuanced understandings of the multiple and far-reaching consequences of human (in)action. Water does not adhere to municipal, provincial, or national borders. It flows across them. Benidickson explains, "watersheds represent quintessential polycentricity problems" (xxviii), meaning that actions affecting one region of the watershed ripple through the system. To fully understand the history of a place (e.g. Lake of the Woods), Benidickson effectively argues we must consider the whole.

Historic failure to consider the whole—

particularly, the unintended consequences of human myopia—is a reoccurring theme in the book. Perhaps one of the most compelling examples that Benidickson provides is mercury poisoning at Grassy Narrows and White Dog Indian Reserves. The impact of mercury, a process ingredient in pulp and paper making, on aquatic systems received limited attention until the late 1960s. Both Canadians and Americans believed that "contaminants were unlikely to reach harmful concentrations because of the significant volumes of water available for dilution" (197). Facilities owned by Dryden Chemicals and Reed Paper began to discharge mercury into the English-Wabigoon

River in 1962 (200). By the time mercury contamination prompted "urgent regulatory responses," an estimated twenty thousand pounds of mercury had been dumped into the river system (203). Methylmercury then bioaccumulated up the food chain, moving from contaminated organisms eaten by fish to Indigenous band members. This example illustrates how human activity on waterways is never isolated. What happens upstream can have egregious consequences downstream.

Although references to Indigenous communities in the Lake of the Woods watershed are peppered throughout the text,



¹ National Ocean Service, "What is a watershed," U. S. Department of Commerce, accessed 24 June 2019, <<https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/watershed.html>>.

engagement with Indigenous histories is extremely limited. Benidickson's Western lens is reflected by terminology. Anishinaabe treaty partners are rarely identified by their chosen name. Benidickson more commonly refers to the Anishnabeg by colonial groupings like "Native" or "Indigenous." We recognize that "Aboriginal" remains appropriate when writing about "Aboriginal rights" because those are protected and recognized by the Canadian Constitution Act (1982); however, phrases like "Aboriginal representatives" (232) could be clarified to better represent Anishinaabe understandings of the nation and of the self.

While naming conventions make it difficult for readers to imagine the Anishnabeg as a politically distinctive group, Benidickson's focus on American and Canadian persons further obscures Anishinaabe presence in the watershed. For example, there is little sense that Devil's Gap Bungalow Camp—which "contributed significantly to regional tourism" (160)—was constructed on reserve lands. Leases negotiated by the federal Department of Indian Affairs were hotly contested by the Rat Portage Indian Reserve for generations, resulting in regional news coverage by the early 2000s.² There is no sense of the violence, referred to as "persistent friction" (169), surrounding the expulsion of Sturgeon Lake Ojibwe Band from Quetico Provincial Park. Reports of forced removal by gunpoint are absent in Benidickson's telling. The destruction of traplines and

cabins are passed over. Ontario's failure to provide monetary or land compensation is also strikingly absent.³ Indeed, the high density of the Anishinaabe population is unclear until page 223. It is here that readers develop a sense of the Lake of the Woods watershed as an Indigenous space. Benidickson makes clear that "[t]welve First Nations live within or adjacent to the Kenora Forest boundaries, the highest concentration within any provincial forest management unit" (223). A map following on page 231 shows that settler communities—like Kenora—are surrounded by Anishinaabe reserves. Such oversights can be linked to Benidickson's source base. There is no denying that this is an exceptionally well-researched and convincingly argued text from the federal and provincial standpoints. Benidickson includes a range of written sources from company correspondence to local newspapers to case law to debates recorded in the House of Commons. However, settler sources make it difficult to see the violence mentioned above, allowing a benevolent paternalism to undergird excerpts on Anishinaabe history.

The text's strengths come from Benidickson's ability to clearly explain cause and effect across time and space. Benidickson uses accessible language; his conversationalist tone makes "quintessential polycentricity problems" understandable to undergraduate and faculty readers alike. Benidickson ends each chapter with a paragraph introducing the next topic. For example, Benidickson prompts connections

² "Cottages may lose big bucks," *Fort Frances Times*, 4 May 2007, <<http://www.fftimes.com/news/district/cottagers-may-lose-big-bucks>>; Aldo Santin, "Lawyers sued for \$8.4M over cottage loss," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 3 March 2011, <<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/lawyers-sued-for-84m-over-cottage-loss-117302563.html>>.

³ Leo G. Waisberg, Joan A. Lovisk, and Tim E. Holzkamm, "Ojibwe Reservations as 'An Incubus upon the Territory': The Indian Removal Policy of Ontario, 1874-1982," *Papers of the 27th Algonquian Conference* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1996), 337-52.

between bacterial waterways and flow regimes intended to optimize navigation and power production (112). Style and content are mutually reinforcing in *Levelling the Lake*. Benidickson argues that upstream activity affects downstream communities. Similarly, chapters flow together. Given these strengths, Benidickson's text would be suitable for anyone interested in northern resource development and management, Canadian-American relations—or, more generally, borders and boundaries—and, ecosystem health.

From a philosophical standpoint, *Levelling the Lake* encourages readers to reflect on their position within and relationship to watersheds. Our day-to-day actions

and the industries we support shape our neighbours' and our descendants' access to resources. Benidickson's text thus provides us with a framework to better engage with contemporary debates about water (mis) use. His historic analysis can help us to make sense of contemporary problems like microplastic consumption and to imagine its temporal and geographic breadth. In the midst of environmental crisis, Benidickson's book is a must-read for water users.

Brittany Luby, Assistant Professor, University of Guelph

Margaret Lehman, Undergraduate Research Assistant; Manomin Research Project, University of Guelph

Thunder Bay & the First World War, 1914-1919

By Michel S. Beaulieu, David K. Ratz, Thorold J. Tronrud and Jenna L. Kirker

Thunder Bay, Ontario: The Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Inc., 2018. 232 pages.

\$20.00 softcover (large format). ISBN 978-0-920119-84-6 (thunderbaymuseum.com)

Published on the 100th anniversary of the end of the Great War, *Thunder Bay* is a lavishly illustrated history of Fort William and Port Arthur at war and a comprehensive overview of the political, military and social events that ultimately shaped the future of these two communities. A timely and worthy addition to the canon of commemorative First World War histories, this volume successfully blends the controversial aspects of the Twin Cities' response to the conflict with many of their citizens' heroic battlefield exploits.

Co-authored by four historians, this scholarly effort is well-researched, having drawn heavily on a wide variety of archival records and an extensive list of secondary sources. One principal strength lies among

countless quotes from contemporary letters and newspaper articles, particularly those often-poignant words written by soldiers in the field. For example, after the Battle of Mount Sorrel (June, 1916), Private Will Davey, a steam fitter from Port Arthur, would write home of men "blown to atoms," then ask his wife to "Kiss the children for me, and tell them to pray for their Daddy out here" (85).

In time, the Lakehead would provide drafts of soldiers to many units in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), especially to the 8th Battalion (90th Winnipeg Rifles), then later to the 28th (North West), the 52nd (New Ontario), and the 44th (Manitoba) battalions. Still other volunteers would be sent to the Canadian and British navies and